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MEASURING IMPROVEMENT IN LANGUAGE ESSENTIALS

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The English department of the Oak Park High School conducted an experiment to determine what improvement could be made by its pupils with a list of twenty-one essentials in composition. The survey measured the writing ability of the entire student body, fifteen hundred pupils, in September, 1919, and in February and June, 1920. The list of minimum requirements, twenty-one in all, is given below. For the various tests composition assignments were given calling for papers one page in length upon the topic "An Interesting Experience." Papers were scored by using the index numbers one to twenty-one of the minimal list.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS IN NINTH-GRADE ENGLISH 1920

1. Use *complete sentences* in all connected writing .
2. Make the *subject* agree with the *verb* .
3. Use *personal pronouns* correctly; know the declensions .
4. Know the principal parts of the following verbs: *see, do, come, go, sit, lie, give, begin, ring, and write* .
5. Use a *period* at the end of declarative sentences .
6. Use a *comma* to set off words in *direct address* .
7. Use a *comma* to set off expressions in a *series* .
8. Use a *comma* to set off *appositives* .
9. Use a *comma* to set off short *direct quotations* .
10. Use a *comma* before *and, but, for, and so*, between *co-ordinate clauses* .
11. Use a *question mark* at the end of *interrogative sentences* .
12. Use *quotation marks* to inclose a *direct quotation* .
13. Use an *apostrophe* to denote the *possessive case* of nouns .
14. Use an *apostrophe* to denote the *omission of letters and figures* .
15. Use a *capital letter* to begin the *first word* of a sentence .
16. Use a *capital letter* to begin important words in *titles of themes, essays, and books* .
17. Use a *capital letter* to begin the first word of a *direct quotation* .
18. *Spell correctly*; consult the *dictionary* on doubtful words .

19. Avoid *unnecessary commas*.
 20. Avoid *unnecessary capital letters*.
 21. Avoid the *comma blunder* by using a *semicolon* or a *period*.

In Table I individual teachers are numbered 1, 2, 3, etc.; below each teacher's number is placed the average number of errors (twenty-one kinds only) made per pupil in one page of composition.

TABLE I

	Freshmen								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
September.....	3.4	2.7	5.8	2.7	5.1	4.0	2.7	2.6	.....
February.....	1.6	3.5	1.8	1.7	1.8	2.4	1.8	1.4	.....
June.....	0.7	1.5	1.9	1.2	1.5	2.4	1.0	0.8	.....
	Sophomores								
	3	4	7	8	9	10	11	12	
September.....	1.7	1.6	2.6	2.6	2.5	1.1	4.1	1.6	.....
February.....	1.7	2.9	2.8	2.2	0.9	1.6	3.3	1.1	.....
June.....	1.4	1.2	1.3	1.2	1.1	0.8	0.9	0.7	.....
	Juniors								
	1	2	6	7	9	10			
September.....	1.8	2.0	3.0	0.9	2.0	0.8	.....	.....	.....
February.....	1.3	1.8	1.1	1.6	1.5	1.4	.....	.....	.....
June.....	0.4	1.3	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.0	.....	.....	.....
	Seniors								
	1	2	3	4	6	8	9	11	12
September.....	3.7	3.0	3.8	3.0	3.5	2.0	2.7	3.3	1.0
February.....	1.0	1.2	1.1	1.5	1.2	0.9	0.9	2.3	0.3
June.....	0.4	0.5	0.7	0.3	0.5	0.4	.....	0.4	0.3
	Summary Averages for Entire Classes								
	Fresh- man	Sopho- more	Junior	Senior					
September.....	3.9	2.4	1.6	2.9	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
February.....	1.9	2.0	1.3	1.0	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
June.....	1.4	1.0	0.9	0.4	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....

The September data were put into the hands of the teachers, and the department set out to teach the twenty-one essentials with more professional interest. The February survey revealed an improvement in almost all classes, Freshman and Senior classes showing the most marked advance. The Seniors, their pride awakened by their poor showing in September, made very marked progress. The teachers advanced various explanations for the progress or retrogression of their classes; for example, teacher No. 2 explained that several very poor writers had entered her Freshman class after September. Teachers 3, 4, and 7 mentioned the excessive amount of literature in the first half of English II as a possible explanation. The total average score, however, for each class in February is much lower, and, therefore, better, than the September performance.

TABLE II

TOTAL ERRORS FOR SEPTEMBER, 1919, FEBRUARY AND JUNE, 1920

ERRORS	FRESHMEN			SOPHOMORES			JUNIORS			SENIORS		
	Sept.	Feb.	June	Sept.	Feb.	June	Sept.	Feb.	June	Sept.	Feb.	June
1.....	44	32	23	75	77	11	13	21	14	8	9	5
2.....	19	19	17	20	31	17	7	13	10	9	2	6
3.....	11	13	11	20	6	13	10	29	9	17	4	3
4.....	36	21	8	5	5	4	18	3	3	15	3	1
5.....	90	13	18	45	19	8	4	14	5	17	5	2
6.....	12	9	22	20	4	3	3	9	2	20	1	0
7.....	25	14	9	34	36	11	14	8	5	31	9	5
8.....	18	10	11	17	2	7	2	4	16	7	3	0
9.....	21	9	3	7	3	1	4	2	2	9	1	0
10.....	382	113	68	85	117	23	70	80	21	152	46	16
11.....	15	14	13	12	15	3	9	31	10	37	9	2
12.....	51	13	18	14	6	5	3	12	7	16	0	1
13.....	118	54	47	56	50	36	16	16	13	20	18	6
14.....	14	11	3	29	13	7	7	9	10	32	1	0
15.....	48	5	8	24	9	3	4	2	0	0	3	1
16.....	27	22	13	8	9	3	14	17	7	17	5	1
17.....	13	1	2	4	0	1	3	3	7	8	0	2
18.....	494	307	252	398	361	207	125	180	116	179	117	42
19.....	132	72	37	88	103	35	35	28	7	5	19	7
20.....	40	35	19	47	48	32	11	13	7	26	12	6
21.....	165	50	44	61	54	22	32	21	9	29	10	3
Total...	1,775	837	646	1,069	968	452	404	515	280	654	277	109
Papers...	451	423	452	444	484	431	239	377	303	219	273	222
Average...	3.9	1.9	1.4	2.4	2.0	1.0	1.6	1.3	0.3	2.9	1.0	0.4

The June averages, as can be seen in Tables I and II, were all better. Table II, especially, shows that about the same faults persist in all classes throughout the year, even though there is a notable decrease. The spelling record (18), the independent clause score (10), the incomplete sentence (1), the comma blunder showing (21), the apostrophe (13), and the period figures (5) are serious offenders in the beginning and at the end of the school year.

It appears desirable that an English department have similar data every year in order to determine its real progress. The compilation entails drudgery, but the exhibit justifies the expenditure of time and strength. With such comparisons before them, both teachers and pupils work eagerly to bring their work to a high standard. Many researches of this sort may accumulate evidence which will enable us to say that a Freshman should make not more than four mistakes per page in September, two in February, and one in June. If many high schools could thus measure their achievement, there might be made possible an inter-city and an inter-state standard. Of course, the ideal of 100 per cent perfect should always be the ultimate objective in all classes at all times.